

**Present:** First Selectman Gayle Weinstein, Selectman David Muller, Selectman Dennis Tracey, Superintendent Dr. Colleen Palmer, Chairmen of the Board of Education Phil Schaefer, School Business Manager Dr. JoAnn Keating, Town Administrator Tom Landry, Administrative Assistant Randi Derene, Weston Residents

**Ms. Weinstein called the meeting to order at:** 7:30pm

This meeting was recorded and videotaped. Copies are available in the Selectmen's Office. The meetings are available for viewing online via the Town's website.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Ms. Weinstein led the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Discussion/decision regarding the Board of Selectmen's review and transmittal of the Board of Education's budget to the Board of Finance. :** Dr. Colleen Palmer and Chairman Phil Schaefer

Ms. Weinstein has some questions to ask Dr. Keating. Regarding the MERS calculations, Ms. Weinstein asked if any of the people are P/T or work less than a 20 hr. min to be in CMERS. It seemed like in every column it was 100% that went towards the MERS calculations. Dr. Keating replied all employees that are under the MERS calculations do meet the 20 hour threshold. She did some reductions in the facilities dept. where some stipends etc. were not MERS applicable. Summer help does not qualify. Regarding summer, Ms. Weinstein, she said it wasn't pulled out in SPED and not pulled out in Facilities. In SPED it does count towards CMERS as it is part of their salary, but for Facilities it was pulled because it is not guaranteed it is one of our employees, it could be just a summer job for someone.

Regarding energy, Ms. Weinstein stated that the commodity cost is going up by 20% but the demand by transportation and distribution that we got is only going up about 1.5%.. And Rick Darling said the average is between 1.4 and 2.7%. She stated that Dr. Keating has budgeted a rate of 10% increase for that at a cost of \$35,000. The company that we use also charges an additional rate on top of that. Dr. Keating confirmed that what we do pay is the amp. Once the demand hits a certain level, usually at this time of year, we do receive bills for 3 or 4 months, for several thousand a month. She had to put in some funding for that. Ms. Weinstein asked her to look at that number again since it was just an estimate.

Regarding the adjustments that are being made, Ms. Weinstein stated that Dr. Keating decreased the rate adjustment for field lights by \$6100, and wanted to know if that is the \$800/ month? Dr. Keating said it is not a complete wash of \$800 a month, probably more like 30% differential. Even with the 25% reduction in heating oil, that it still doesn't reach the break even for oil. Ms. Weinstein added that the current price stated in their memo is 2.3472, which is actually the rate for next year. Dr. Keating confirmed.

Regarding technology, Erik Haakonsen couldn't be here tonight, so Ms. Weinstein will pass on her concerns to the BoF to take a closer look. The information provided in the memo still doesn't match the actual number of computers purchased. One of her biggest concerns is that they budgeted for a certain amount of computers, and when we lease them, we lease them for more than what we budgeted for. On top of that, there were actuals not included. The list of philanthropic grants and donations do not match the actuals that were provided to the BOS. Dr. Palmer asked Ms. Weinstein to forward the questions to the BOF and they will review with Mr. Haakonsen.

Ms. Weinstein asks for confirmation that all philanthropic donations had to be approved by the BOE. Dr. Palmer replies that these donations do get approved by the board. Ms. Weinstein points out the grants listed are not on the list. Dr. Palmer said she will review with him as well. -Inconsistencies re the SPED numbers that were given to us, she has concern about what the BOE knew that they approved as well as the decrease that came from the change in Erik's position. Because of the timing of the BOE meetings, they never voted on amending their budget request to include the change in the IT structure or the reduction in the SPED request. Ms. Weinstein wants to make sure we are all on the same page, that the number that BOS will have to bring forward in the documentation to the BOF is the original 3.17%. Mr. Phil Schaefer adds that once the BOE adopts a budget and hands off to the BOS and the BOF, we don't have to formally make any changes as a vote as a board. He confirms that any information needs to be communicated clearly to all the stakeholders. In the case of technology, the board was aware of the situation prior to Eric formally resigning, but couldn't be discussed at a public meeting before a formal resignation came in. So the board was fully aware situation and the IT/ET proposed changeover from our administration. In terms of the decrease recommended for the excess operating cost if and when we bring in the ESS into the schools. The board was aware that it made sense to take the proposed excess startup cost off the table since there was uncertainty whether the program would run at all. Mr. Schaefer said that he will discuss this tomorrow at his BOE meeting regarding the IT/ET switchover and the BOS recommendation to take the \$67,000 off the table for consideration for this ESS program. The BOE is still in the explorative stage with this ESS program, and unfortunately some of the transmission of information along the way was not clear. Mr. Schaefer apologizes for that on behalf of the BOE.

Ms. Weinstein says that they need to have a public discussion with the whole board re the IT/ET situation.

Mr. Tracey wants to clarify that what has been given to them is the 3.17% increase BOS budget with comments from the administration which recommends certain changes (the IT/ET structure and the reductions of \$67,000 for the funding gap for ESS) Mr. Schaefer confirms, but adds that along the way things can change before the BOF votes.

Ms. Weinstein has one more question for Dr. Keating. Looking at the year-end (June 2014) financial report and noticed that you have several encumbrances. Under maintenance projects, there is an encumbered \$65,000 for this year. What is that for? Dr. Keating replies that is a

commitment that is made at the end of the year for a specific purpose. Projects that come in after June 30<sup>th</sup> are paid through the encumbrance account and are expensed in the prior year, but not paid until the following year.

Mr. Muller said there is a reconciliation process for each encumbrance. Dr. Keating doesn't remember off the top of her head what the \$65,000 was for. Ms. Weinstein asked because the budget was "0", so to have an encumbrance of \$65,000 brought up a concern.

Mr. Muller says that we are looking at a large number, so when we are looking at an opportunity to come in at a lower number, he would want the town to address that to try to get to the lower budget of 2.8 %. There were a lot of questions asked during this cycle, and he appreciated the hard work that went into answering all of them. The largest expense of this town goes toward the school... which is why we pay such careful attention. Mr. Tracey says yes we have asked lots of question, not criticizing educational judgments. This is one of the best educations that money can buy. It's been delivered excellently and at a reasonable cost.

Ms. Weinstein is very pleased about the direction this district is heading... blended learning, virtual learning, reducing the high school class sizes, adding new classes at the HS, reducing the numbers of sections at the MS, changes to the interventions system wide such as having teachers in place for early reading intervention and adding writing workshops at the high school. These are all really positive changes that will benefit our students. The reality is we are facing declining enrollment and we don't have the grand list growth to cover increasing costs of rising budgets. Ms. Weinstein notes that all of our administrators have come forward with what they feel is an appropriate budget for balancing the needs of our community with the needs of our student population, but she doesn't feel the pencils were sharpened quite enough. She makes it very clear that she is not looking to cut any programs or increase class sizes. Looking at other areas though... technology: cut back on computers purchased and still have plenty to go around... so Ms. Weinstein recommends cutting back \$100,000 from the purchase of new ChromeBooks. Regarding additional teacher technical training for \$6,500, Ms. Weinstein questions why we need this when we are looking to put in an increase in technology integrators whose role is to teach teachers how to use this integration in everyday life. Regarding stipends, at the High School, she recommends they increase the number of stipends that they have, because you have a large number of programs that are run by teachers on a volunteer basis. At the middle school – there are many programs that are in the budget book that don't appear on your club list (i.e. Math Counts, Science Olympiad, Writing Lab, Mock Trial, Debate Club, School of Rock and Marching Band) \$8300 to stipends for clubs that are not on your list. If they are not on your list, then Ms. Weinstein questions / assumes they are not happening this year. Ms. Watkins explained that Mock Trial is active this year, but it takes place during school hours, and the stipend is used for weekend or after school trials, which are paid by the hour. Ms. Watkins clarified that the stipends requested for clubs that didn't run this year, will be offered again next year... and if they don't run next year either, another club will be offered and that stipend can be used elsewhere. Regarding additional PBIS coaches... historically the assistant principal has handled this... regarding behavioral issues... this is an additional \$11,000 that she feels could be cut. Drug and alcohol problem... understands it is an issue at the Middle and High School. She would like to see more programs at the Middle School... and she questions

why we pay for drug testing for students... should be parent's responsibility. Asking why we want to cover that instead of the parents. Marimba not a necessity... \$3000 can be saved there. Perhaps the PTO can raise money for that purchase. Regarding facilities, Mr. Olenick has been doing a great job, but she thinks that some of the contracts and services could use a closer look. Given the reduction in students, she would like the bus routes to be looked at again... for every bus route that we have she thinks it can be reduced by approximately \$22,000, especially with the use of the new software that is now available.

These are just recommendations, but not ultimately her decision. What the BOS needs to decide is what the Town can afford. Ms. Weinstein feels that 2.5% is a Town increase that is acceptable, and would like to ask the BOE to mirror that increase. Mr. Tracey adds the emphasis of the importance during periods of declining enrollment the need to reduce our infrastructure costs if we are ever going to see material savings. This needs to be key priority in the coming 12 months. There are way too few students for the infrastructure that we have. The more costs that can be shared with the Town the better.

Mr. Muller said that he is most concerned with the technology budget. He said we need to recognize these types of line items that we can control. Residents continue to ask why our budget numbers are going up when the school population keeps going down. We need to address this issue. Dr. Palmer adds that she would like to request an in-depth examination of the technology budget so she can provide more thoughtful answers to all the BOS's questions. Mr. Muller does support standardized technology, and Dr. Palmer adds that the school would make sure they can maintain this fleet of technology.

Mr. Muller makes a motion to approve the transmittal of the BOE budget to the BOF for the amount of \$48, 548,977.00. Mr. Tracey seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Discussion/decision regarding the Board of Selectmen's review and transmittal of the First Selectmen's budget to the Board of Finance**

Capital Budget: After we made the appropriation for the chief's car, Mr. Landry took another look at the Vehicle Sinking Fund and she would like to reduce the budget by another \$25,000. Also, she would like to keep the money in the sinking fund that was originally allocated for the oil tanks.

Mr. Tracey asked a question about the Selectman's budget. He made a request to increase the First Selectman salary but it has not been included in the budget. He would like to request but Ms. Weinstein said she could not honor that request. Mr. Tracey said the salary that they approved for the last 6 years has been \$43,875. That is significantly below comparable salaries in peer towns. He feels we are falling far behind a reasonable salary and feels this is the time to increase it. He would like to increase to \$60,000 for First Selectman, feels it is commensurate with the job. Mr. Muller agrees with the comments and knows there have been previous attempts to raise the salary but it has always been rejected by the incumbent. Ms. Weinstein feels it is too high. Mr. Muller makes a suggestion of splitting the difference and making it

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\$52,000. Mr. Tracey agreed. Mr. Darling updated the total Town Operating budget to \$12,408,752.

It would be little over a 2.5% increase. (Approximately an \$8000 difference). Ms. Weinstein thanked the selectman and appreciated the increase.

No other comments regarding the Town Operation Budget.

Only change is the \$25,000 reduction from the Vehicle Sinking Fund.

Capital Budget is now \$1,304,558

Mr. Tracey moved to transmit the First Selectman's budget to the Board of Finance in the amount of \$12,408,752. Mr. Muller seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Muller moved to transmit the Capital Budget to the Board of Finance in the amount of \$1,304,558. Mr. Tracey seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Tracey moved to transmit the Debt Service budget to the Board of Finance in the amount of \$6,390,963. Mr. Muller seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

**Executive Session: Litigation Update**

Ms. Weinstein made a motion to move into Executive Session to discuss the litigation update. Mr. Muller seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

**Adjourned:** 8:28pm

Respectfully submitted,  
Randi Derene  
Administrative Assistant

Minutes Approved: 11/19/15